



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
11 June 2012

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Twentieth session

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples, a non-governmental organization on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 June 2012]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **People's Republic of China: The self-immolation protests by Tibetans calls for international scrutiny**

In adopting resolution 1723 in 1961, the UN General Assembly solemnly renewed the “call for the cessation of practices which deprive the Tibetan people of their fundamental human rights and freedoms, including their right to self-determination.”

Reaffirming this call in 1965, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2079 on Tibet declaring “its conviction that the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Tibet and the suppression of the distinctive cultural and religious life of its people increase international tension and embitter relations between peoples.”

Decades later, the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights adopted resolution 1991/10 on the “Situation in Tibet” expressing concern “at the continuing reports of violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms which threaten the distinct cultural, religious and national identity of the Tibetan people” and called upon “the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) fully to respect the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people.”

Since the emergence of the 2008 Uprising on the Tibetan Plateau, governments and NGOs have repeatedly expressed their concerns on the human rights crisis faced by the Tibetan people. For instance, on 16 March 2008, 65 NGOs appealed to Council members to hold a special session “to address the ongoing gross human rights violations against Tibetans with regards to their right to life, freedom of expression and assembly, among others...to seriously look into the cases of violent crackdown on a series of peaceful demonstrations in the “Tibet Autonomous Region” and Tibetan areas of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces in China.”<sup>1</sup>

On 8 April 2008, human rights experts of the human Rights Council issued a joint statement underlining that: “Information received by the mandate holders describes the arrest on 28 and 29 March of over 570 Tibetan monks, including some children, following raids by security forces on monasteries in Ngaba County and in Dzoge County in the Tibet Autonomous Region. ... The UN experts are deeply concerned by reports of security forces firing on protestors and alleged killings. Amid concerns that independent observers and foreign media have been restricted from accessing regions in which protests have taken place, the United Nations experts call for full access for independent observers and journalists to such regions and complete transparency on the part of the authorities.”<sup>2</sup>

This statement also recalled that China had “invited several fact-finding delegations, including one consisting of journalists and another of foreign diplomats, to visit the Tibet Autonomous Region. Such visits are no substitute for granting access to those United Nations experts who have requested a visit to China. While welcoming the Government of China's previous invitations to United Nations mandate holders, it is nevertheless urged to respond equally positively to outstanding visit requests to enable mandate holders including the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to them by the Human Rights Council.”

Unprecedented in the history of the Tibetan struggle for the protection of their fundamental rights, on 27 February 2009, Tapey, a Kirti monk in his mid-twenties, walked alone to a nearby crossroads in the market area of the town in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), Ngaba county,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.forum-asia.org/?p=7082>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/04E93C974F48F850C1257427002D7EAD?opendocument>.

Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan province, setting himself on fire, raising a home-made Tibetan flag that had at its center a photograph of the Dalai Lama. Sources say that when the monk began to shout slogans (no details are yet known of what he said), People's Armed Police (PAP) personnel stationed nearby opened fire, and Tapey fell to the ground. Reports indicate that the PAP extinguished the fire after Tapey was shot and he was immediately taken away by police. His current whereabouts is unknown.

Since 16 March 2011, 37 Tibetans (31 men and 6 women) protested through self-immolations with 29 of them known to have died following their protest<sup>3</sup>. On 11 February 2012, Tenzin Choedron set herself on fire early in the evening, raising slogans against the Chinese government, according to sources in exile. She chose the same place as nun Tenzin Wangmo<sup>4</sup>, the Sumdo bridge area below the nunnery, which is around three kilometers from Ngaba county town.

As these self-immolations continued in 2011, China resorted to a heavy-handed crackdown, especially at monasteries and nunneries of those who self-immolated. On 21 April 2011, in a statement the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances said that "more than 300 monks of the Ngaba Kirti Monastery, located in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, were allegedly arrested and taken to unknown destinations in ten military trucks. The arrests were reportedly carried out by agents from the People's Armed Police, the Public Security Bureau and the People's Liberation Army."<sup>5</sup>

"We call on the authorities to provide full information on the fate and the whereabouts of the persons who have disappeared," said the Working Group, noting that it is reported that some of the monks have been released. "We encourage the authorities to undertake full investigations into the on-going practice of enforced disappearances and ensure that those responsible are prosecuted and receive sentences appropriate to the gravity of the crime."

In the aftermath of PRC's repressive measures, reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and custodial deaths have emerged. For instance, on 14 January 2012, shooting followed the self-immolation of a Tibetan layman in Ngaba town when the Tibetan was observed being beaten severely by police as the flames were extinguished. Other Tibetans gathered around in distress attempted to take the body of the Tibetan who self-immolated away from police. According to various sources the Tibetan was dead.<sup>6</sup>

In order to hide these developments, many Tibetan areas in Sichuan and Qinghai provinces have been virtually cut off from the outside world with journalists from foreign media, including BBC<sup>7</sup> and CNN<sup>8</sup> detained and expelled. A journalist who was able to sneak into Ngaba town reported that: "Sections of the town famous for its Tibetan Buddhist monasteries have come to resemble an armed camp. ...The security was so dense that it was impossible to speak with clergy or, indeed, anyone in Aba ..."<sup>9</sup> Another journalist who

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.savetibet.org/resource-center/maps-data-fact-sheets/self-immolation-fact-sheet>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ9lAsZ2kgo&list=UUHdZMcmQoEx8K5yeUpajptA&index=5&feature=plcp>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11122&LangID=E>

<sup>6</sup> <http://savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/escalation-ngaba-following-self-immolation-two-tibetans-shot>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16977978>.

<sup>8</sup> [http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/30/world/asia/china-arrest-grant/index.html?hpt=hp\\_c2](http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/30/world/asia/china-arrest-grant/index.html?hpt=hp_c2).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/02/14/138867/rare-visit-to-remote-chinese-region.html>.

managed to enter Ngaba observed that “Aba has road blocks, spot checks and a security presence reminiscent of conflict zones in the Middle East or Northern Ireland.”<sup>10</sup>

On 1 November 2011, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Frank La Rue, expressed his “deep concern about allegations of restrictions to Internet access and mobile messaging services within Aba Country, as well as journalists’ lack of access to the region.” In his view, “rather than taking such measures, the Government should instead listen to and address the legitimate grievances of the monastic community.”<sup>11</sup>

As to the analysis on why these self-immolations are taking place, Ming Xia, a professor of Political Science at the Graduate Center and the College of Staten Island, the City University of New York asked: “Why are Tibetans setting themselves on fire with such frequency? The Chinese government has denied any responsibility, instead blaming the Dalai Lama for encouraging such radical actions. However, this claim doesn’t stand up to scrutiny. The Chinese government has told the West that the Dalai Lama is irrelevant to Tibetans, while telling Chinese and Tibetans within China that he has been marginalized to the point of becoming a ‘political orphan.’ It’s therefore illogical to accuse him of being the mastermind behind radical actions taken by Tibetans.”<sup>12</sup>

Confirmed information has now emerged that two separate self-immolations one by two Tibetan youth in the Tibetan capital Lhasa on 27 May, 2012 and another a few days later by a mother of three children in Tibetan area of Dzamthang (Chinese: Rangtang) county, Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan. A mother of three, Rikyo was believed to have been 33 years old. Rikyo’s self-immolation is the fourth to have occurred in the small town of Dzamthang, and takes the total number of such protests throughout Tibet to 38<sup>13</sup>.

The official media reported that Lhasa’s Public Security Bureau has set up a special task force to investigate the case. According to official documents, more than 3,000 security personnel have been deployed to bolster security in Lhasa following the first Tibetan self-immolation protest in the Tibetan capital. This document dated 29 May, 2012 reveals that: “In the last 24 hours alone, 11,731 vehicles and 28,046 individuals have been searched...among those, it said, 157 Tibetans from the Tibetan-populated Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan “were closely questioned, and 35 who were found without proper permits were sent back to their native places.”

Given this background, we urge the Human Rights Council to pay a thorough examination to the human rights crisis faced by the six million Tibetan people whose fundamental rights and freedoms have been violated for more than six decades without any condemnation by the highest UN human rights body.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://tibet.net/2012/02/13/tibetan-acts-of-self-immolation-rise-amid-the-battle-for-hearts-and-minds/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11555&LangID=E>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://tibet.net/2012/02/07/tibetans-burn-selves-for-freedom/>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.savetibet.org/resource-center/maps-data-fact-sheets/self-immolation-fact-sheet>.